

SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW.

Clem Ashford was born in 1909 at Scone to a pioneering family. His father was a member of parliament and a few years after Clem's birth became Minister for Land for the N.S.W labour government. Subsequently the family moved to Sydney and settled down in Mosman.

When Clem turned fifteen his father died and the rest of his family returned to Scone leaving Clem in Sydney. He stayed with friends and got his first job as a postage boy; when he turned sixteen he commenced work at the Commonwealth Bank.

While the Great Depression was beginning to hit Sydney, Clem was paying for his own board and food and starting to enjoy himself. It was around this time that he met Margery, whom he married when he was twenty-one.

He was transferred to Newcastle and had a growing desire to leave the bank. He went to study architecture but found out he had to be apprenticed. Unable to afford this position, as he had four children by now, he remained with the bank.

He began working to earn extra money, doing jobs from housepainting to working for bookmakers at the races. He began printing and designing his

own lampshades and ashtrays. From this Clem began to make beach bags in which he enjoyed great success. The bank highly disapproved of Clem's extra activities but he carried on regardless. He began to realize, through his customers at the bank, that there was money to be made through owning a milk-bar or a theatre shop.

The theatre shop in Stockton came up for sale and Clem purchased it for four-hundred pounds. He renovated it and renamed it "Shipmates." Only confectionary and sandwiches <sup>were</sup> sold in this shop which proved to be successful. Clem was juggling three jobs at this stage, the bank, designing and manufacturing the bags and Shipmates. Peters Ice-cream asked him if he would like to move to Newcastle Beach with his business.

He sold Stockton Ship-mates and began Newcastle Beach Ship-mates. He increased his food-line to include fish and chips, pineapple fritters and fruit salad. Up to four thousand serves of chips were sold each day, Clem had a huge success. It was around this time he left the bank due to the massive work-load.

Not much later he began the Dairy Delite which was a franchise selling ice-creams.

On the first day of business a massive eight thousand serves were sold and Clem believes the police were controlling the crowd.

Clem then purchased a sandwich shop which he extensively renovated and called it "The Crystal Bar." At one stage he was operating five shops and employing one hundred staff.

It was at this stage that his personal relationships were without happiness and he found he had to leave for a while. He travelled to Cape York Peninsula for six months and then onto India for a year. He returned to Newcastle for five days only to leave again for the South Pacific. Clem experienced a sense of belonging in the Polynesian Islands and remained there for two years.

He returned to Newcastle in 1975 and started to print frocks with his unique design on them. From the success of these he was able to buy the old miners cottage in Frederick St Merewether which later became "Clams."

He has been actively involved in "Clams" for eleven years now and at this stage at the age of eighty has not begun to think of retirement.

CLEM ASHFORD

Transcript of the interview

My name is Michelle Ashford and I am interviewing my grandfather Clem Ashford for a Regional History project in Open Foundation. The date is 30 August 1989 and I am interviewing Clem at his house in Merewether.

Michelle:

Tell us a bit about your family and where you were born.

Clem:

Both my grandparents were pioneering families, one was into wine and the other had a property, that eventually remained in the family for 100 years.

I was born in 1909 in Scone itself and I lived there for the first 4 or so years until the war began. In the meantime my father was a member of parliament. He was put up for parliament and was elected in the Dubbo area and that meant that a great part of his life was spent in Sydney. Having a wife and children, we lived 20 miles out of town and in those days 20 miles was at least an hour and a half in the sulky to go out, so it wasn't convenient to be coming up and down 8 hours in the train to Sydney, so we moved to Sydney, near Randwick.

Being in a ministerial position as a Minister for Lands we had a government car and there were no restrictions in those days, a government car belonged to the family, it didn't matter if it was used for hairdressing or taking the kids to school, nobody said anything and I can remember going along and seeing the soldiers marching down the street singing "Get out and get under, get out and get under".

Michelle:

Get out and get under what?

Clem:

In those days not many people had cars and they were always breaking down, so they had to 'get out and get under' to fix them.

Michelle:

You left school at sixteen...

Clem:

We lived at numerous areas in Sydney and finally settled down in Mosman.

When I was 15 my father died suddenly. He wasn't elected to parliament that year, so he was going back on the property again for he was working too hard for someone who had been sitting back doing more or less office duties and he just died suddenly, when he was just a shade under 50.

The idea then was to move back to the property. I stayed with friends in Sydney and when I was 15 I got my first job as a postage boy of V.R. Hall and that job kept me going for a while.

I went home at Christmas to the property, then I got a job at the Commonwealth bank through influence which you really needed in those days, it was not a matter of passing exams or qualifications, it was simply who you knew.

Of course, in those days Bank staff were regarded much more highly in the community than now, but I never wanted to work in the bank, I wanted to stay on the property, but I was working in the bank by the time I was 16 and I was living on my own money. With the money I earnt in the bank I had to pay my board and live on it.

I enjoyed Sydney during the twenty's days, although the depression was coming on. Things were very hard, people didn't have work and the unemployed in those days only got 5 shillings a week which enabled them to buy 5 meals a week. alot lived in huts and on the beaches around Sydney, down Chinaman's Beach and some of the expensive beach areas now, onced housed unemployed.

Fortunately I was very lucky to have a job in the Bank but you couldn't look sideways or you'd get the sack.

Following that I got attracted to Margery and eventually became engaged. I was very keen to get married, being lonely and away from home, not that I didn't have friends, it's just that growing up age. When I was about 20 I wanted to get married but I had to wait until I was 21 and so I got married when I was 21.

I joined the Bank when I was 16 in 1926 and left the Bank in 1946. In the meantime I had been transferred to Newcastle, I always had the idea of moving out of the Bank but when you have a family and you have your money every week and you get a pair of shoes half soled and you're broke for the next fortnight, there's never any chance that people get caught in a job that their money isn't enough to lift them out of it.

I decided then I would like to do architecture, so I went and did higher mathematics at the Technical College for 2 years but in the 3rd year I had to be apprenticed. I found out then that I couldn't possibly afford to be apprenticed with a family to keep, because I had 4 children and you can't keep four children and be apprenticed. I had to stay with the Bank.

During the time I had been studying, I had spent extra time working to make money, so starting from house painting and one thing or another and also pencilling at the races and doing the bag for the bookmaker, which the Bank highly disapproved of, eventually I got into making lampshades and then from the lampshades, the parts of the lampshades were handpainted, I went further on and started making ashtrays out of felt, with mexican men and fringed edges on them and they had a paper fastener for the centre of the felt and

people put them over the arms of their chairs and I think I got about 1 and 11 for them. I used to sell them at 'Grovers' at Hamilton and Gary had all the shops seeing if they would take them and I think I got about 23 shillings for the work on a dozen, but that was good money to me.

From then I got the idea to start making beach bags, so Margery and I, she did the sewing on the bags and I did all the designing, printing, sewing, the assembly of the bags and putting the brass eyelets in with an eyeletting machine, roping and packaging them. We quite a considerable amount of money on that.

Michelle:

You had a letter didn't you from David Jones?

Clem:

Yes, I had this letter from David Jones saying, this was much later on when I was still making them, that it was one of the best lines it had and they were sorry they had to give up my line but due to other obligations they could not keep going so tied down with an American firm with another line which included the bags.

I went to see if I could sell to Miss Mythyas of "Cursons", she was not very keen at first and then people came up to the counter trying to buy them when I put them down, after about three people had tried to buy them she said "send me down two dozen". After that I received a telegram from Cursons saying "Keep sending, no restriction on the order" because she knew I could only make so many, and from then I made really big money on that. I still worked in the Bank at that time and it was all weekend and night work.

Michelle:

What were the Bank thinking of you working?

Clem:

The Bank didn't approve of any one working in those days, you couldn't have two jobs but if you put it in your wife's name they can't say anything about it because they have no control over her, so I just did it in joint names with Margery.

Eventually with that money I bought, I used to have a Mrs Jukes come, she ran the Strand Theatre and the lolly shop, when the Strand Theatre was in existence.

Michelle:

Across the road from David Jones was it?



Clem:

No, it was just opposite Martin Street. Mrs Jukes worked there and she was married to someone who was connected to the Fuller family and she used to go into the Bank through me, and she used to pay in six hundred pounds a week, there was only she and her husband there and it was pretty obvious to me, the Manager was getting twenty pounds a week and I was getting seven pounds a week in the Bank, it was very obvious that they were making much, much more. You begin to think what your customers are getting and why you are working in the Bank so I said to her if any milk bars or theatre shops become available or vacant, let me know.

One day she came in and told me "The chap from Stockton wants to get out there, it will only be a few hundred pounds the money he owes and he can't pay his rent every week and they really want to get rid of him from the theatre. I went over to see this man and I offered him four hundred pounds for the business and he actually jumped at it. I took over, I closed it for about a week and repainted it and called it "Shipmates" and decorated it up with shipswheels and fishnets and fish and a few paintings on the wall and the girls wore blue overalls with red pirates hats.

The first being Stockton, a very conservative area, you come into Stockton and you're a stranger, and they stick to the shopkeeper over road and for the first couple of weeks nobody came in. It took about a month, the end of the month I would have my place packed compared to the place over road, because they had become used to me by then and they liked it, so I started packing the sweets in, buying the sweet sleeves and doing them up in the cellophane bags because nobody was doing that and they went very well, and good orange drinks and milkshakes and coffee.

Michelle:

Were you selling fish then too?

Clem:

No, only confectionary and theatre stuff and then you could have sandwiches and coffee afterward the pictures. At the time I was running that, I was making the bags too, so in the morning when I first got up I would go over to the theatre shop and bring in the milk, lock the door, go over at five o' clock when I had finished at the Bank, go over, I got up at 4.30am in those days, go across and let the two girls in that ran the shop. Then I would go home and make dinner and Margery would go over and look after it while I had my dinner, for a while and stay until the interval rush then she would go home and I would stay on and do the rush after the theatre. After that I would go home at night and start printing the bags until 3.00am in the morning, then go to bed to get up in the morning at 5.00am to go through the same routine every day, and all day Sundays because the theatres were not open on Sundays then.

Michelle:

The theatres would have been very busy then too.

Clem:

Yes, they were very busy because there was no television or videos so all the movie places were packed. So from there, I had done so well there that Peters Ice-cream asked me if I would like to do Newcastle Beach, I went down to see the chap who was there but he was a little bit frightened of me because he had been making good money and he wouldn't give me any figures as to how much money he made so I just looked, his wife had all these diamond rings and they had a Daimler car and another car and a place up in Peel Street and they were building another place some where around so I didn't need to ask if he was making any money, but then when I tried to get some figures off him he just went um and ah because he thought that because I used to be in the Bank he thought I might have had something to do with the Taxation department because he had very little knowledge like that.

Michelle:

I suppose it was understandable for him.

Clem:

Well they had been there for twenty years and that was in 1967 so I had sold out to a chap at a really good price the place at Stockton to a Greek from Maitland and he bought it for his girlfriend, so he paid me well for it.

Then when I got to the Beach the only place you could buy fish and chips was mum's and dad's and down at the Sydney Show they had been selling chips down there and they were doing quite a big trade and it was run by people who ran a restaurant in Sydney they had special cone paper for it, they had special grease paper that wrapped like a cone and filled it up with chips, I went down there and had a good look around and got the idea there from a chap who tried to sell me a potato peeler. I went HMAS Adelaide they were pulling to bits and saw this potato peeler and saw it would be run on different power to what I would be using, that was when I bought the ships wheel, that was 1946.

I thought otherwise and I bought a peeler and had it fitted up and I started selling chips at the beach and that's how I got the name potato chips.

Michelle:

So there was no-one else around then.

Clem:

Selling was something you did at the Sydney Show, you didn't do it anywhere else. So the chips down there, because the oil was very clean and they were freshly cooked and they put in at the right temperature because I had enough stoves and they were nice and crispy on the outside and floury on the inside and I worked up such a reputation that I was selling chips at Newcastle beach on a wet day, I would have a queue waiting on a wet day.

So, from there I moved up, I read the paper one night at home and there was a baili~~ff~~ff sale up in Hunter Street No. 4 Hunter Street which doesn't exist now, it's part of the park there. I went up there, there was a big Russian lady there with a big bull neck, thick nose and tough as you could be, and she ran a brothel upstairs and a dining room. She had a chap living with her, I talked to her about it and she said she had this man living with her and he paid for the things and she said he was "yellow", and she said she chased him with a carving knife and he got scared and ran away, and she said he now had the boots in to her, fancy being scared of a knife.

I ended up buying the business, I hadn't thought of it the day before, I only paid about four hundred pounds for it, and I actually bought the building which was about three thousand pounds in those days. From there I started selling these chips and I used to have a queue for the best part of twenty years, January 1950 I started there and called it "Shipmates" and I got one of the Jenkins, Alec he did all the carpentry for me, we worked together and I started selling the chips and from then for the next twenty years there was a queue right up around the corner and all the chips were freshly cooked.

Michelle:

So you prepared all the food freshly on the premises.

Clem:

Yes, everything was prepared on the premises, and then from chips, we started off with chips only, and from that I put in, they had an ice-cream cone at that time, a square cone and I started and filling the cone with a salmon, potato and onion mixand also a filling with mince meat, potato and onion and then they were dipped in batter and I calles them "frittzels", I invented the name, I took the patent on the name frittzels so no-one else could use it, because there were pretzels, but this was frittzels, so I started selling these frittzels. I used to do bananas in batter, banana fritters, and the bananas were done in a sweet batter with cream on top and the pineapple fritters rolled in cinnamon and sugar. Eventually I put in a refrigerator to carry fish, and then I started selling fish as well as chips. The only thing that got me about selling fish at that time was that it changed my award, I had to go into the shop assistants award.

Michelle:

So what was the award beforehand?

Clem:

I used to operate on the refreshment room, like a sweet shop, you know with just pineapple and bananas and chips and I had fruit salad and fruit drink. At that time people either had an ice-cream shop or they had a fish shop, nobody ever mixed things originally, that was the first of mixing them.

Michelle:

How many people did you have working for you then?

Clem:

At that time I had twelve fryers going and we would serve up to four thousand serves in a day.

Michelle:

How many potatoes would you go through in a week?

Clem:

There were about 160 serves to a bag and I think there were 16 bags to a tonne, so we would go through a couple of tonnes a day. It was a never ending job, I used to work that hard that I would be open of a night and you couldn't get the place closed, people wouldn't go home.

Michelle:

This was more or less the only place.

Clem:

Yes, it was the only thing to do, I would be there at 2.00am and eventually when I went to go home the girls would have to come in to do the pans, the oil had to be taken out every day of the two main fryers and it was moved down and down and when it got to the end fryer it all went out. The oil never got any more than honey coloured, that was why they were so good.

When I went to go home late at night, I would be so tired, by this time I had given up manufacturing the bags and sold the place at Stockton and when I got the beach going, I had the place at Stockton, the beach tied up, the bags and the Bank, at that stage was when I gave the Bank up, because I always felt you've got something behind you with each stepping stone, without making one big leap, without giving everything up and going into the thing. I used to be that tired of a night that when I left I'd go outside and think "did I turn the stoves off" so I'd go back inside and turn the stoves off, and I'd go back to the car and I'd think "did I close the front door" and when I get to the door I think "did I

really turn the stoves off", you work when your asleep. I used to have to say to myself " I've turned the stoves off, I've turned the stoves off", or " I've locked the door, I've locked the door"

Michelle:

So with your fish were you just battering the fish? It was all fresh wasn't it?

Clem:

No, it wasn't fresh fish, the only fresh fish we had was gummy sharks, and people used to love them but you couldn't say it was shark, we used to say in those days when they weren't so strict that it was Whiting.

Every piece of fish was cut to the tail, you know cut to the point, so everyone would come in and say "I want a nice tail piece like I had yesterday", because everybody though they got the tail, because that was the instruction, you had to slice it down then cut it to a point.

Michelle:

What sort of fish were you using in those days?

Clem:

We were using hake, I think it was two and threepence a pound, twenty three cents a pound, that's forty six cents a kilo.

Michelle:

Compared to what it is now.

Clem:

The potatos were fourteen shillings a hundred weight, that's a penny a pound, we were charging six pence for them, so it really good money then.

Michelle:

So you just brought in the frozen fish and it wasn't prepared or anything.

Clem:

From that I got the idea of selling donuts, I saw the people over the road who lived in a terrace house, they were on the pension, and I offered them a rental for the downstairs and to do the upstairs for them and they jumped at the idea, because they only had pension money and for people who had no money all of a sudden had this money coming in in rent, every week, I think I was only paying them about twenty pounds a week, which was alot considering their pension was only 3 or 4 pounds. I moved in there, and I had these donuts, all kinds

of donuts, and they used to be iced with pineapple icing and passionfruit and strawberry icing and then they would have walnuts and cream and toffee. I made up my own recipes, with the yeast and the flour and I never used the gowny flake, everybody used gowny flake then.

Before I started that one somebody came and asked me would I do the Dairy Queen, so I got the place next door under the same circumstances, and started off with this Dairy Delight, it was the same as Dairy Queen but it was Dairy Delight, and I got a franchise to sell that. Well the first day there I took 200 pounds on sixpenny serves that's 8 000 serves the first day. The police were down there, the whole of Hunter Street was blocked, I ran an advertisement in the Sunday paper and it blocked the street.

Michelle:

And the police were down there?

Clem:

The police were down there controlling the crowd, it was that bad.

Michelle:

How many people did you have working in your shop?

Clem:

Only about 5, I only had a counter 10 feet long. It was a most amazing success, such as successful as the chips.

After that I started the donut stand, but eventually the donuts, the donuts went well but they needed a bit of backing so we started the hamburgers and donuts which went well together. I'm convinced in business that the more you try to sell the less you'll do, if you try to do everything you don't get it, it's like selling seafoods you have to stick to seafoods.

Michelle:

How were you packaging your food then?

Clem:

That was another thing that was a winner, because I had so much going I couldn't keep control of the money so I was good friends with the Geoffery's in Sydney, they were in Dixon Street, they were paper bag makers, everybody used paper bags then or you would use these bags made out of grease paper or some such thing. I hit on a way of keeping control of the money by having a chip bag printed with "Chips" on it in bright red and that would hold one serve, the girls couldn't give bigger serves, then I picked on a tall narrow bag for holding fish, and then there were bags for the frittzels, and there were bags in all sorts of shapes and sizes, and the

girls used every bag for a serve. Then I had larger bags to put the smaller bags in, the larger bags were only made out of ordinary paper like brown paper, and if you put them in with the inside bags you had alot of grease, so you had to use the inside bags, so the outside bags were never worried about, they were just carry bags. So I had track, and of a day I would put down 1000 of these and 2000 of these.

Michelle:

That was really innovative.

Clem:

And on the other side of the Dairy Delight I used to have a measuring stick to go in the milk drums, and I would know what was used by the height of fluid in the drums, in the machines, I don't know if they still do it but they should be emptied out every night and put back in the drums, in the fridge and not left in the machine, the machine should be washed out every night.

Michelle:

So "Shipmates" wasn't really affected by seasonals? Through winter was it still as busy?

Clem:

No, well that was one reason when I had the beach was, the beach made good money, very good money and it was a good business to run, it was enough for a family to live comfortably on, and fairly good class. But you finished selling at say the end of March and you didn't start again until September, so you had all winter to sit back and have a holiday, and then you came back to work again. The drawback of it was that I felt you were at the whims and wishes of the council and you could only get a 2 year lease, you can get a 10 year lease to start with but you can't get any more, you could only get 2 years without it going to tenders, so once the lease goes to tenders if you get what ever the council decides 10 years or 15 years but you could only get a 2 year renewal because you were getting it without a tender, so it meant every 2 years, you get the lease renewed, and you've got that insecurity, your waiting for that 2 years to come up and you might say "oh no forget it" and all of a sudden overnight you have no job and no business, that's why I started up the street.

One day I was up water-skiing up at Shoal Bay and I struck a little girl up there and she was nice and she was a nurse. We were skiing on the same boat. She said she was looking after her brother who had a nervous breakdown and she said "you would know them they've got that delicatessen shop between Coles and Woolworths", and she said they were trying to sell it but they couldn't get the money for it. I said "How much do they want?" and she said she thought they wanted only 6 thousand pounds for it and I said "I would like to have a look at that", because it immediately struck me that if

I had a shop there I could do very well, so I went to see them and I ended up buying it.

It was only a narrow little place, and I did all the counter with looking glass, little squares of glass and a stainless steel top and I painted everything royal blue, I put royal blue laminex and orange laminex and glitter and I called it "The Crystal Bar". I put a wood bar across the roof in royal blue with a white ceiling above and it was really startling.

It was a milk bar with ready cut sandwiches. I used to make the sandwiches up out of the shop and bring them down and my instructions were the fillings had to be as thick as the sandwiches and I had plenty of butter on it. Everybody at that stage was going and buying there sandwiches off Coles. When my sandwiches started mine were a penny more, a penny was quite a bit in those days but they were well worth it and all my sandwiches were going that fast because the sandwiches were juicy and nice. Coles went and did a special window display, right next to my shop, only around the corner, with a table set with sandwiches "available inside", but they didn't realise that why mine were selling was the quality of the sandwiches. That makes you think how people don't mind what they pay, it's the quality that they want within reason.

That place was such a success and I had those going and then Bill..

Michelle:

How many places did you have going at once then?

Clem:

I had the two on Newcastle Beach, and the "Shipmates" and then over the road I had the "Dairy Delight" which is a different place with all the drinks, with kinds of milkshakes and drinks and next door I had the hamburger shop going, called "Sugar and Spice", "The Crystal Bar" in Hunter Street, then the "Shipmates Dairy Whip" at Garden City, and it was a terrific success, and Gary came along to me at this time, then later when I left and Tony did the other one. I used to have 100 girls working for me.

Michelle:

That was quite alot of people to have working for you. Then were there other places coming up in competition?

Clem:

No, I had it all my own way.

Michelle:

So when did you start travelling then?



Clem:

By this time I had been putting up with alot at home, and Adrian is one person who realises what I put up with, because he was there, he said he had never heard anything like it, and I decided at that time, I had been reading books and doing yoga, because I was going to the gymnasium and I was doing weightlifting, and Alf Lester said to me "What about yoga, don't you ever do that?", and I thought that wasn't for me because not many people did it then. He said "Can you do a headstand?" and I said "No," and he said "Isn't that a challenge?". So I learnt to do headstands, and it really got me in. I started reading books on yoga and yoga philosophy and about mental happiness and tranquility in your life. I realised that the life I was living, and the partner I was with, with alcohol, that none of it fitted together, I was always going to live in a turmoil. Another thing that disgusted me was, that I had worked all those long hours and worked that hard to make that money to be torn to pieces, especially when your trying to do your best for everyone, and all the work, and you think, well money hasn't brought me any happiness, it's only brought me unhappiness.

So when things came to a point at home, and it wasn't my suggestion, it was suggested that I go, I went, and I was supposed to come home again, but it wasn't on. Then when I left, and because of that, of having everything and striving for everything, having to stay at the best, eat the best, and do the best, I became friendly then, at that stage I was brokenhearted inside, and when I went to Sydney one day and I bought a couple of Alan Shores paintings and I've never confided to anyone how I felt about my troubles. I thought I can't go any further, and I thought here's a good one I'll tell him, and he said to me "You're just the person I'm looking for, I've got so many women I don't know how to look after them all", it's just the opposite to what I expected, saying sympathy and that, he made fun and so from then I got the opportunity to mix in with all the "hippie" crowd in Sydney, that sat on lounges without springs in them, did a bit of smoking now and then, they just lived their lives on the floor. After all the Victorian Leagues, and all the other things it was such a relief to me.

When I left home I went and lived up in a room with nothing, I lived in a bare room for a long time. I wouldn't buy food unless I felt like eating, you just learn about life, and it doesn't take money to make you happy, you can be just as happy without it. I found I was just as happy, I had saved up some money to go to India, so when I broke up the marriage, to get away from everything, I went and lived like a hermit up on Cape York Peninsula. I came back after 6 months of living on the beach and in the bush and having some really good experiences. I came back again, not to go back to the old life, all the money had been taken care of, and I had very little money, but I had paid my fare to India.

I went across then to India, and the thing was we would land in Madras, we went across to Singapore, Penang and then I ended up going across to Nugapucknum, south of India and

Madras and working my way up in a very cheap way, really hippie living to New Delhi, and from there I went up to live in ~~Cashmere~~<sup>Kashmir</sup> in a house boat, very poor house boat too, only 3 rupees a night, about 2 shillings a night.

I lived in India for a while; I had my return ticket and in those days when you had a return ticket to Sydney you could keep going forward, so I was able to include in that Bangkok and Manila and Hong Kong, not like today. Most of the time I had Allan with me, and while I was there I met Yappa, an Israeli girl who was very lovely. She travelled back to Australia; I met her when she got here, and I got her a job through John Laws.

When I came back I bought back alot of things with me, all those things that had to be checked by customs. I had all kinds of gadgets I had picked up from along the way, I eventually got through customs. I stayed here for five days and I got on a yacht with Alec Hankin to go around the Pacific for 7 months. The day before we left the navigator dropped out; here we had this boat that was about 30 feet long, and 8 foot 6 inches wide, and four bunks and five people to go around the Pacific, and no navigator.

We kept going, we just put the compass on 045 degrees and we got there. There is a mountain there that is 4000 feet high, visibility of 4000 feet is about 80 miles on the ocean, so you have 160 mile range to keep in. There are alot of wrecks and reefs around Noumea, and before we got there, the whales came around and worried the other boats, but how we got rid of the whales was we put the motor on, we had an auxillary motor, and that frightened them.

Michelle:

So you came back then after that?

Clem:

No, when I got to Western Samoa I had this big row with Alec, and deserted the ship. He said "What are you going to do? live on the island or on the ship," and I said "Alec, I'm going to live on the island". I stayed there for 3 or 4 days and it was a lovely place, the people were lovely, but then I went back because if I wanted to stay I had to go and see the Immigration Department in one of the larger towns, I wouldn't have been allowed to stay there, because they are very strict, you are only allowed to stay there for 4 days, at that stage and even the citizens there, if they take up a New Zealand citizenship they are only allowed back as visitors, only allowed back the 4 days.

When we got down there, so we decided, I hadn't seen immigration by that stage, Alec wanted to go to Aggy Grey's that night and I thought "Oh no, this is the very thing I've been avoiding, because you get all these hotels with all the western influence. I decided to go with him, I didn't want to go but he wanted me for company.

The next day we went in by dinghy, and I hopped off because Alec's much bigger than me, and I'm lighter, and I hopped off onto a rock and held the dinghy to pull him in and a wave came over and pushed the dinghy and a copper nail went through to my bone. I spent 6 weeks in hospital, in the mean time they waited about 3 weeks for me, then I watched them go out through the reef, and I felt I had control of that boat, although we had those rough seas, like for 9 days before we got there every body thought it was the end, the boat was leaking and we didn't know where we were, so it was like a bit of heaven when we did find the island. But I had an idea that we found it, I felt like a polynesian because I never heard of Savay islands until we got there. I felt just like I belonged there; everyone has a dream of living on a pacific island with the palm trees and the reefs, it's just a dream, it was really just a dream come true for me. I wouldn't eat any european food they offered me, I would only eat the island food.

Michelle:

So you learnt the language and everything?

Clem:

I know a considerable part of the language, but I never learnt the language completely because they only have nine letters, five vowels and it's all inter<sup>or</sup> mation. You hear them talking about one thing, some words have forty meanings, because of the shortage of words. I can pick up language of what people are talking about but they also talk in alot of proverbs. I know all the polite sayings, as for following the conversation, I couldn't, it goes too fast.

In meantime Alec's gone off again, they set off for Tahiti, so after about 6 weeks, I asked if I could go out to the village for the last week or so, and they said yes, the customs read the rights to me about staying there.

Michelle:

So you left the hospital then.

Clem:

Yes, I went out to the village, then I decided after I had been there for a week, that I had better catch up with Alec again, I had to get back to Australia; he had gone to Tahiti, so I got on a plane and flew across to Tahiti. I stayed there with ~~an~~ old french ladies, in a very old boarding houses for only \$3.00 a day, opposite the post office. I had quite a good time then, and mixed with quite a few people. I waited and waited and used to go down to the yachts coming in every day, and they were never there. Eventually I got a message from the post office that they had gone down to the Cook Islands. I thought "What about the Cook Islands? I'll possibiliy get there and they've gone somewhere else", instead of going to the Cook Islands, I went back to Western Samoa again to live in the village.

I got in there on a permit somehow or another arranged, and when I left western Samoa I went down to Noumea. I didn't have much money left by that stage so I was expecting to get some money, but in the meantime I only had about \$20.00 or \$30.00 so I think I spent about \$20.00 and I got in a light plane and I went up to Malakula Island, because it was one of these uninhabited islands with the Europeans, there were a few Frenchmen there and a bit of a hospital and a few of the English because they were both represented and on this island lived the big Nambas.

I was anxious to get to these really primitive people; they had been head hunters five years before and they never wore any clothes, they used to wear a coconut belt and then they would wrap their penis up in this fluffy stuff and pull it up and tuck it in the belt, and leave their testicles down, and I thought I would like to get up to this primitive place. I got there, and I became friendly with a guy named Marcus; he had a wife living in one of the villages, so I said to Marcus "Look, this is all I've got", it was only \$7.00 or \$10.00, so I gave it all to him. He said "Don't worry about it, I'll look after you." The first thing he did was to go and buy two bottles of Lemonade. He spent the money, and he was glad to have me for company, and he was looking after me. He took me to the village where his wife was. When I got to the village where his wife was, they didn't rush up and kiss and hug each other; he rushes and picks up the little boy and makes a great fuss of him, and then I have work out that this was his son, and I had to work out who was the mother of the son, because they don't introduce you.

I learnt a lot from that guy going through and we got to villages there with no money, and we travelled right around. I was told I should take Malaria tablets because all sorts of diseases were going around, so I started taking these tablets, but I felt so well after a while I didn't bother and within a few days I caught Malaria.

When I got back to where we started on Malakula Island, the French people were the only people coming in on planes and because I didn't speak French they wouldn't pick me up. I just had to stay there and stay there. Eventually someone got me on a plane going to Santo, and then I explained to the woman, that I had paid for the ticket, and they didn't pick me up, so I was allowed to stay at the hotel but there was no food. That's all they would be responsible for, and I had no money for food, but I became friendly with the natives and they were buying me food and drink. Eventually I got down and the money wasn't there, even when I got back to Port Vila, and there was a French Hotel there so I went along, and I had a credit card for Hotel Australia which impressed him very much, and he said I could have my meals there and give him the money when I had it. Eventually I got a draft then from there I came down to Fiji again, and back to Australia. I stayed for about a week, and went straight back because I was allowed to stay for another 6 months on the island, and I lived the best part of two years over there.

Michelle:

So you were away from Australia except for those 5 days you weren't really here for a while.

Clem:

No, I wasn't here for a while. I lived up there and when I did come back I would go back again.

Michelle:

So you came back, and started up Clams 11 years ago.

Clem:

No, when I came back I had to get a divorce to fix up business for marital affairs. After that I bought Clams. It took me about a year and a half to build, that's fourteen years ago.

Michelle:

You bought that little miners' cottage to live in didn't you?

Clem:

Yes, that's right. When I came back I still had no money, so I got some material and started doing screen printing the same as what they did the carpet printing on the islands. I used to print the frocks and I used to sign them "Tulomulolo" which was the title name they had given to me up there. In 1969 I went back and got the tattoo.

From then I went on unemployment then on the pension, then with money I got from the frocks I bought the land for Clams.

Michelle:

The frocks were a success weren't they?

Clem:

Yes, I've had a few successes, and Clams was a terrific success when we first started it, but of course Gary helped me there with finance in the end. There is only one thing I'm sorry for that I really got tied down with Gary; I wanted to make it into a takeaway.

Michelle:

Like "Shipmates"?

Clem:

I think in some ways I know they have take away at the Wharf, because they can pay the rent it is alright, but in some ways takeaways are so much easier than restaurants.

Michelle:

There is so much into restaurants, there are so many things.

Clem:

There are so many worries.

Michelle:

Staff and everything.

Clem:

You can get a person work in your place, coffee shops are nearly down to that standard.

Michelle:

But, with restaurants they are a whole different ball game again. So, do you think Newcastle has changed it's eating habits from starting off then and now?

Clem:

When I first came to Newcastle, when the kids were young, you would go down to the Northern for dinner. Hardly anyone would eat out, we were one of the few who ate out, who only ate out if you had money or were making money. When you did go to eating out, there was the coffee shop in Bolton Street, and otherwise you went to a Greek milkbar that had coffee, or steak. You could get a hotel meal, but a hotel meal in those days consisted of a set menu, Chicken or roast beef, Fruit salad and ice-cream or plum pudding and that sort of thing. It's only the latter years since the war that we've had all these other places coming in bringing in all these new foods. Apart from that there were exclusive restaurants in Sydney, places you went to, but you could count them, otherwise it was just an ordinary pub.

Michelle:

I think also with Newcastle, people are going back to the cheaper alternative.

Clem:

I agree, people are also eating in centres, like shopping centres, The Wharf, it's a centre because people congregate there. Darby Street is turning into a centre were people congregate. A restaurant that is a bit out of the way has to be a bit different to draw people there; you can do it, like I'm a bit out of the way aren't I? But I can understand people eating at The Wharf, there is something to walk around and see afterwards, and the other big thing is, that you can eat and have a few drinks in town and walk back to the accomodation.

Michelle:

That's changed everthing too now like drinking and DUI is so prevelant.

Clem:

Yes, not like before when you take the risk. People don't take the risk now. I think Newcastle has a mining town feeling where everyone knows everyone else, but Newcastle is finally coming into it's own now.

ESSAY

NEWCASTLE - DINING OUT:



In the last twenty years Novocastrians have benefited from the growth of the restaurant industry in the area. With only forty-seven eating establishments, including cafes and milkbars in 1948, Newcastle now claims to have the most highly concentrated number of restaurants per capita than in any other part of the state. In an industry where the average life-span of the same operator in a restaurant is only five years, Newcastle has witnessed the rise and fall of a number of establishments. The industry holds the misfortune of having one of the highest rates of bankruptcy in Australia so the operators need to recognize the current market trends and display a keen intuition. Because of this only the most astute operators survive.

Even though Newcastle now enjoys a highly concentrated restaurant nucleus, it has not always been that way. Being a working-class town, it is still a relatively new experience for the average citizen to dine out. Money was and still is an important factor in deciding where the diner can choose from. This puts increasing pressure on the restaurants to produce their food at the lowest possible prices. There is a need for restaurants to put together

1. Newcastle Morning Herald 18.3.48 p2.

special deals and prices to attract the customer. The majority of Newcastle restaurants offer deals ranging from half-price lobsters to free desserts with meals. It is unlikely to find this sort of enticement in any other part of the state. These types of sales gimmicks are obviously advantageous to the diner.

It was only in the 1960's that free-standing restaurants began to emerge in Newcastle. In the past meals <sup>were</sup> provided by clubs throughout Newcastle and its environs had kept restaurant patrons to a minimum. Club meals were basic fare such as steak and eggs and prices were kept to a minimum through subsidies.

With the arrival of migrants into Australia came the introduction of many continental type foods previously unknown. Salami, cabanossi, caviar and paprika were all novel to the Australian. These types of foodstuffs began to be filtered through the market initially to cater for the new Australian. It soon began to be fashionable for Australians to purchase these foods and not much later they had acquired a taste for it. Delicatessens were able to expand their variety of products and in the late 1950's there was a boom in the sale of the product. A delicatessen owner in 1956 commented that "there is no doubt that before their arrival (migrants) our standard

of smallgoods was low and flavourless.<sup>2.</sup>

Not all the food changes had taken place in the delicatessens which only provided the basis of meals, Newcastle had started to experiment in dining out. At a coffee-bar and restaurant specialising in Italian dishes the owner claimed "business has never been better."<sup>3</sup> Hungarian food appeared to be one of the more popular types of cuisine available. Due to the heartiness and quantity of the food and the fact that all the ingredients were available locally, therefore recognisable to the diner, made it an attractive cuisine to the Newcastle customer. An owner of a Newcastle restaurant specialising in Hungarian food claimed "75% of my customers are Australians as most Europeans cook their own national dishes at home."<sup>4.</sup>

Chinese Restaurants have always been popular in Newcastle and in the early 1960's they symbolized the current market trends. In 1960 the "Khing Doo" Chinese restaurant opened in Hunter st as an addition to the original "Khing Doo" in Beaumont st, Hamilton.<sup>5</sup> The owners were unable to cope with the influx of people desiring this

2. Newcastle Morning Herald 17.2.56 p5

3. IBID 3.5.58 p5

4. IBID

5. Newcastle SUN 7.12.60.

cheaper alternative cuisine. Therefore Hunter st "Khing Doo" was erected becoming the first Newcastle restaurant to have air-conditioning. This restaurant was one of the most successful restaurants of its time in Newcastle.

Chinese restaurants led the way for the introduction of other cuisines. In 1970 one of the first articles on dining out appeared in the Newcastle Morning Herald.<sup>6</sup> It was claimed that new restaurants and the upgrading of existing eating facilities had lifted Newcastle's eating habits into "a field of unprecedented sophistication."<sup>7</sup> The accent was on lower-priced eateries and for those customers unwilling to explore other cuisines substitutes were readily available. The writer of the article, Tom Barrass, predicted there was even better to come.

"Restaurant facilities some costing up to \$100 000, introduced recently have given Newcastle a choice of dining out previously unknown and there is better to come in the erection of super motels on Newcastle beachfront"<sup>8</sup>.

The transistion of Parby st, formely know as Lake Rd, from a street of neglected old terrace buildings that housed a potpourri of professional offices,

6. Newcastle Morning Herald 7.12.60 p 4

7. IBID

8. IBID

small businesses and residences to Newcastle's most popular restaurant <sup>area</sup> has only occurred in the last six years. Today there twelve sit-down restaurants, ten take-away food outlets and two coffee lounges. Only one restaurant has remained under the same operator for more than five years.

In 1965 Don Curtis and Cliff Reed took over the Habenera, a long-running nightclub suspected as operating as an illegal brothel. The Habenera was a notorious building, originally a boarding-house where two suicides had occurred and a fire which extensively damaged the insides of the building. Don Curtis and Cliff Reed changed the name to The Bistro which has remained so for twenty-four years. Initially a steak-house, the dual owners sold in 1973 to Betty Redding who in turn sold to Gary and Pam Ashford in 1975.

When the Ashford's took over the Bistro ~~there was~~ <sup>ere</sup> only two other competitors in Darby st. The Red Fox was one of those competitors; it was formerly a residence and began operating as a restaurant in 1972<sup>a</sup>. It became L' Hippo's approximately five years later, serving French food under Lloyd Moffatt. Another few years later it was to become Locks 9. Newcastle Morning Herald. 8.10.84

Restaurant owned by Ian Savage. In 1987 the restaurant changed hands again, this time to serve Vietnamese cuisine trading under the name of Lans.

Moffats Oyster Bar began trading in 1963 selling freshly opened oysters for take-away purposes. Soon people desired to eat in the shop and wanted varieties of oysters, this business lasted over fifteen years. Ned's Noodles took over the premises. Unfortunately this restaurant was without the success of its predecessors. Selling a large range of pastas, without the pizzas, was not economically viable at the time. The restaurant closed down after just eighteen months. Next on the premises was the

Blue Max, a German-style eating house. The Blue Max managed to keep afloat for approximately six years and finally after many months on the market sold out to Roses Caribbean in early 1989.

The cuisines of no less than eight nationalities are available in Darby St now plus speciality menus such as vegetarian, health food or steak and seafood.

With such a flood of eateries into Darby St there is bound to be a few costly failures. Farmer Joes, occupying the corner building of Darby and Council

sts proved to be an enormous mistake. Reportedly costing over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million dollars just to open the restaurant, it only managed to keep open for just six weeks. This type of misadventure only underlines how a proprietor must thoroughly research and possess an awareness of the finicky Newcastle customer.

In 1988 Newcastle was gripped by a chain restaurant building boom. Within a few months Sizzlers in King st, The Black Stump in King st, McDonalds in King st, all opened their doors to the public. In the last year two more Sizzlers have opened and three more McDonalds are in various stages of completion, all reflecting Newcastle's choice of dining. While these franchise restaurants are conquering all before them an alternative which has proven extremely successful is Mexican food. There are only two Mexican restaurants in Newcastle; Taco Bills in Derby st and Mucho Mexican in the Junction. They are serving up to two thousand customers a week between them. Considering the restaurants' size and the fact that they are only open for four hours each day, this type of food has to <sup>be</sup> one of the most popular in Newcastle. The cheaper prices, quality and quantity of the food is the attraction, reflecting the

some principles which attracted Novocastrians to Hungarian food in the late 1950's.

Newcastle appears to have come along way in the restaurant industry. Back ~~to~~<sup>in</sup> the 50's and the 60's, when only business could afford to dine out and restaurants were scarce, to having such a thriving industry today has had a bewildering effect on Novocastrians. When restaurants today state the most popular item on the menu, dishes such as Spaghetti Bolognese for Italian and Spring Rolls in Chinese Restaurants are still rating highly. With the franchise restaurants enjoying so much success in Newcastle by relying on plain, uncomplicated food shows that the majority of Newcastle diners are still caught up with attitudes of the 1960's and 70's. While Newcastle has come along way in the provision of eateries, the diner is yet to realise their full potential. Tom Barrass' prediction in 1970 "there is even better to come" is still applicable in 1989."

10. Newcastle Morning Herald 24-10-70



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